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Collegiate Life from Both Sides of the Desk: South Dakota State University in the 1880s

Lisa R. Lindell

The ninth of August 1888 was a day to remember in the history of South Dakota State University and the life of one of its first students. On that day, John Merton Aldrich and two classmates graduated from the institution then known as Dakota Agricultural College (DAC), becoming the first to complete the full college program.¹ Excited and a little dazed, having just become engaged to be married the previous day, Aldrich still took time to recount the ceremonies in his diary, a record he had faithfully kept throughout his three years at DAC.² Among his teachers and mentors at the fledgling institution was Robert Floyd Kerr, who would go on to become one of the university's most highly respected faculty members. Kerr shared Aldrich's passion for recording events, and the professor's diaries and memoirs, along with his student's journal entries, bring to life the characters and occurrences that shaped the college. Although the two men inhabited the same building and shared

1. Established as Dakota Agricultural College, the institution became South Dakota Agricultural College with statehood in 1889, South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in 1907, and South Dakota State University in 1964. Marcus Antonius Sayler from Swan Lake, Dakota Territory, was actually the first to graduate, but he had entered the college with advanced credit and received a Bachelor of Science degree on 23 June 1886 after only one year's studies.

2. Aldrich Diary (transcript), 8 Aug. 1888, Archives/Special Collections, Hilton M. Briggs Library, South Dakota State University (SDSU), Brookings, S.Dak. Aldrich copied his diaries between 1930 and 1932, adding parenthetical comments of clarification. He mistakenly recorded 8 August as graduation day. The 9 August 1888 *Brookings County Press* and the 1887-1888 college catalogue confirm that commencement exercises took place on Thursday, 9 August.

many of the same experiences, their points of view often differed. Taken together, their writings paint a vibrant portrait of the university's early history, allowing modern-day readers to see college life in 1880s Dakota Territory from both sides of the desk.

Aldrich's diaries span his student years at DAC from October 1885 to August 1888. More than four decades later, he typed copies of his entries and donated them to the South Dakota State University library at the request of librarian and literature professor William H. Powers, who was editing a history of the college's first fifty years.³ Aldrich's daily entries are typically

3. Powers, ed., *A History of South Dakota State College* (Brookings: South Dakota State College, 1931).

In the fashion of college students then and later, John M. Aldrich commented in his diary on 12 June 1888 that he did not particularly like this graduation photograph.



one hundred to two hundred words in length, although some are significantly longer. Displaying an engaging writing style, wit, and openness to new experiences, Aldrich quickly draws the reader into his narrative.

Professor Kerr, like Aldrich, chronicled the daily events of the college's formative years from January to October 1886 and January to mid-April 1887. His observations, however, tend to be more cryptic than those of his youthful counterpart. Kerr later compiled his diary entries, notes, and recollections into a 192-page autobiographical narrative. "Not that I should ever become renowned or that this production shall ever prove interesting to any one except myself do I undertake it," Kerr proclaimed. He wrote, rather, "for the purpose of whiling away some of my time and trying to improve myself in the expression of my thoughts and impressions on paper."⁴ His own modest evaluation notwithstanding, Kerr's autobiography is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the college's beginnings.⁵

Kerr's writings serve to counterbalance Aldrich's diary entries. While the student provided a detailed and often entertaining account of his social, religious, and educational experiences, his professor described college operations, politics, and administrative issues from an insider's point of view. In addition to differences in content, the men's writings clearly reflect their distinct personalities. Aldrich's journals exude energy and enthusiasm, whereas Kerr's memoir occasionally reveals a touch of cynicism and disillusionment. Despite their differences, both men played roles in building their fledgling institution.

The roots of Dakota Agricultural College lay in the Land Grant (or Morrill) Act of 1862. This legislation allowed each state to sell thirty thousand acres of public land for each member of its congressional delegation and to apply the resulting

4. Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," 1894, p. 1, Archives/Special Collections, Hilton M. Briggs Library, SDSU. Kerr's diaries for 1886 and 1887 are part of the Robert F. Kerr Papers, Archives/Special Collections, at SDSU. After 1896, Kerr began compiling a "life diary" with monthly entries spanning the years 1850 to 1920. Some entries reiterate events recorded in his original diaries and "Autobiographical Jottings," but the material after 1894 is a useful source of information on the last twenty-five years of his life. This diary is housed in Archives and Special Collections, DePauw University, Greencastle, Ind.

5. See also Kerr, "Founding," in *History of South Dakota State College*, ed. Powers, pp. 1-23.

funds to "the endowment, support and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts."⁶ Although territories could not receive the funds until they were admitted to the Union, Nehemiah G. Ordway, the governor of Dakota Territory, signed the act establishing the agricultural college in Brookings on 21 February 1881 in anticipation of that event.⁷

Through the efforts of the Brookings townspeople, who purchased and donated eighty acres of land, and the Territorial Legislative Assembly, which passed a twenty-thousand-dollar building appropriation in 1883, Dakota Agricultural College became a reality well before statehood. Following the requisite fund raising, planning, and construction, the preparatory department of the college opened in 1884. Essentially the equivalent of a high school, the preparatory school required students to be at least twelve years old and able to read at the fifth-grade level. Tuition was free to all Dakota Territory residents. Sixty-one students were enrolled by the end of the year, and with only three rooms completed in the sole college building, they stayed in town and commuted to College Hill, three-fourths of a mile northeast of downtown Brookings.⁸

Not until the fall of 1885 were college-level courses first offered at the land-grant institution. On 4 October, nineteen-year-old John Aldrich arrived in Brookings as a first-year student. Like nearly all of his fellow scholars, Aldrich was not native to Dakota. Of the more than two hundred students enrolled at DAC that year, only one gave his birthplace as Dakota Territory.⁹ Aldrich and his family had come from Olmsted County, Minnesota, during the land rush of 1881 to settle

6. U. S., *Statutes at Large*, vol. 12, Act of 2 July 1862, p. 504.

7. With the passage of the enabling act allowing statehood for North and South Dakota in February 1889, the agricultural college received 160,000 acres of land (120,000 Morrill Act acres and 40,000 acres from an additional grant). Official statehood came on 2 November 1889. Charles L. Sewrey, *A History of South Dakota State College, 1884-1959* (Brookings: South Dakota State College, 1959), p. 13.

8. Kerr, "Founding," pp. 1-7. See also Dakota Agricultural College (DAC), Catalogue (1885), Archives/Special Collections, Hilton M. Briggs Library, SDSU.

9. Kerr, "Founding," p. 10.



Standing tall on the prairie, this DAC building housed all the college's facilities when Aldrich and Kerr arrived in the fall of 1885.

in Vernon Township, Grant County, then a good day's journey from Brookings. Traveling in a lumber wagon with his father and sister Nellie, who was also enrolled at DAC, Aldrich first beheld the college rising out of the flat prairie from fourteen miles away. Electing to sleep in the unfinished and still unheated college building, Aldrich became the first student resident. "My feet were rather cold, but otherwise I was comfortable," he commented in an early diary entry.¹⁰ Another early occupant of the central building was Robert Kerr, who had been hired as principal of the preparatory department and professor of political economy. In addition to his teaching duties, the thirty-five-year-old Kerr was charged with overseeing the men's dormitory and boarding arrangements. He arrived on 29 September and occupied a room on the building's second floor.

10. Aldrich Diary, 5, 6 Oct. 1885.

Kerr was born in a log house in Jackson Township, Tippecanoe County, Indiana, in 1850. An eager and gifted student, he was determined to graduate from college even though it meant defying his father, who could see no use for higher education. In 1871, the elder Kerr had grudgingly transported his son and a friend to Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. "When we came to the college he would not drive on the college grounds," Robert Kerr later recalled. "Our effects were dumped over the campus fence and we had to lug them some twenty rods to the dormitory." In order to pay for his education, Kerr interspersed attendance at Wabash and later at Indiana Asbury University (now DePauw University) with farm work and teaching country school. He finally received his diploma at the age of twenty-seven, saddled with eight hundred dollars in debt. Kerr spent the next two years in Kentland, Indiana, first as a teacher and then as Newton County superintendent. In 1879, he eagerly embraced the opportunity to spend a year teaching English and history in Hirosaki, Japan, an experience that he enjoyed greatly and spoke and wrote about often in later years. Returning to the United States, he earned a master's degree from Indiana Asbury University and worked in construction, surveying, railroad engineering, country-school teaching, and bookkeeping until offered the position at DAC.¹¹

The seventh of October 1885 was opening day at the new institution. Nineteen freshmen, forty-three preparatory students, and five teachers began the term. By the end of the school year, these numbers would swell to 252 students and eight faculty members. The first week was devoted to examinations; recitations began Monday, 12 October. During these early weeks, conditions were spartan, disorderly, and crowded. Construction continued in the main building, and a second building, to be used as the women's dormitory, was as yet uninhabitable. By November, Aldrich had nine roommates in his northeast corner room.¹²

11. Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," pp. 91-92, 148.

12. Kerr, "Founding," pp. 10-11, 13; Aldrich Diary, 12 Oct., 9 Nov. 1885. Aldrich used the term "recitation" as a synonym for "class period," a usage common at the time. See Paul Monroe, ed. *A Cyclopedia of Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913), p. 123. The 1885 DAC catalogue specified that "coursés of study and times for recitations are arranged for three daily exercises of one hour each. . . . Students of the College courses are expected to pursue three studies for daily recitation" (pp. 51-52).

"What with eating, sleeping, and reciting in that one building for over a month," Kerr recalled, "it was one of the busiest places this writer ever saw."¹³

The first months of school were also extremely hectic for Professor Kerr. In addition to being responsible for the dormitory and the boarding accounts, he helped assign classes and carried a full teaching load. His official title appeared in the 1885 college catalogue as "Professor of Political Economy, Practical Business, Military Tactics and Principal of the Preparatory Department," but Kerr also taught history, drawing, German, arithmetic, and geography for a time. "We were busy at all

13. Kerr, "Founding," p. 9.

Robert Kerr had traveled abroad and had a varied career by the time he sat for this photograph, taken on the occasion of his ten-year college reunion in 1887. The 1888 date, written in later, is incorrect.



hours of the day," he wrote in his memoir. "I had classes nearly all the time from seven to four-thirty." Kerr drew up dormitory regulations, noting that "there were as yet no precedents and all of the discipline for a while devolved upon me." Liquors, card playing, tobacco, and profane language were forbidden.¹⁴ Although Aldrich characterized the rules as "not very severe," they did stipulate that students could not leave the college grounds after 7:00 P.M. without permission. A bugle call awakened the pupils, summoned them to meals, and signaled the extinguishing of lights.¹⁵ With the establishment of a routine and the arrival of new faculty members in early 1886, Kerr's workload eased somewhat. By the spring of 1886, he was pleased to report that the college had begun "to assume shape. I had evolved order out of chaos to my own satisfaction and the classes seemed to make better progress."¹⁶

In addition to sleeping and working in close quarters, students and faculty boarding at the college ate their meals together, dining initially on the first floor of the college building (or Central, as it would come to be known). Because the dining room could hold only twenty-four people, the boarders ate in shifts, rotating once a week. Upon the completion of the women's dormitory (or South Building) six weeks after classes commenced in 1885, its basement became a dining area.¹⁷ Assigned seating continued, with students and faculty eating together. In his diary, Aldrich frequently noted the names of his current table mates. For instance, on 13 January 1886, he wrote, "Got a permanent place at table, at Mr. Kerr's left." Three days later, the arrangement had changed to accommodate two extra people. "At our table we now have Miss Jenness, Miss Thompson, Miss Aldrich, Miss Glendenning, Mr. Abern[a]lthy, Corskie, Allen and me, Hopkins and Hicks, or Bobby."¹⁸ Kerr, too, took an interest in those sharing his table. In February

14. DAC, Catalogue (1885), n.p.; Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," pp. 149, 151.

15. Aldrich Diary, 15, 21 Oct. 1885; Kerr, "Founding," p. 12. The early curfew may not have been Kerr's idea, as he referred in his memoir to "some rules the Faculty had imposed against my advice" ("Autobiographical Jottings," p. 152).

16. Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," p. 151.

17. Kerr, "Founding," pp. 9, 12.

18. Aldrich Diary, 13, 16 Jan. 1886.

1887, he sketched his "Table No. 3" in his diary and listed its twelve occupants.¹⁹

Along with completion of the South Building, Aldrich and Kerr recorded the raising of the bell in the tower of Central on 21 October 1885. Aldrich described the event as "quite an operation, as [the bell] weighs 750 pounds. I carried the clapper up through the inside, and struck the first tap on the bell with it. Charley Aurick, one of the carpenters, struck it first of all with the toller."²⁰ Another high point of the first college year came with the visit of Governor Gilbert A. Pierce and other territorial officials in the spring of 1886. Aldrich recounted the memorable experience in his diary, describing how college president George A. Lilley brought the delegation up to his dormitory room to meet and shake hands with the young men. The officials' departure later that day was ceremonious as well. "This afternoon we boys marched down to the depot to see them off," Aldrich wrote. "They had a special car, Northern Pacific No. 94. . . . They made little speeches just before the Watertown train left. . . . The militia were out in their new uniforms. The girls marched down, under command of Miss Daniels."²¹

The most unsettling event of the college's first year of operation occurred in June 1886. Lilley, who had come from Corn- ing, Iowa, in the fall of 1884 to serve as the first president of DAC, was forced to resign. Although the preparatory year had passed relatively smoothly, the 1885-1886 college year proved contentious, and Kerr emphasized mounting disciplinary problems in his writings. Both he and Aldrich commented on an incident that Kerr called "the first count against the president."²² In January 1886, students had elected a five-member council whose duties included making disciplinary regulations. When the council recommended stiff penalties for several infractions (for example, in the case of three students accused of drunk-

19. Kerr Diary, 15 Feb. 1887.

20. Aldrich Diary, 21 Oct. 1885. In 1930, the bell was moved to the new 167-foot-tall campanile. For the history of the later structure, see John E. Miller, "The South Dakota State University Campanile: Building a Sense of Place," *South Dakota History* 23 (1993): 321-45.

21. Aldrich Diary, 13 May 1886. Carrie W. Daniels was professor of English literature and rhetoric.

22. Kerr, "Founding," p. 12.

eness), the administration failed to take them seriously. "It makes the Council and most of the students pretty mad," fumed Aldrich.²³

Kerr noted two other disturbing episodes, one on 20 May when "the boys on the upper floor threw a dust box down stairs in order to annoy Prof. Lewis." At a subsequent investigation, "the Pres. demonstrated his unfitness to meet an emergency," Kerr reported. In early June, a group of male students went downtown to attend court without permission. "Another trial and a fiasco," Kerr wrote, which "killed all discipline so far as the Pres. was concerned." As a result, the college's board of directors "met on the 18th-23d and at this meeting the Pres. was reduced to the ranks."²⁴ In a later essay on the history of the college, Kerr asserted that Lilley's demotion was at least in

23. Aldrich Diary, 10, 18 Jan. 1886.

24. Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," pp. 151-52.



George Lilly served as the first president of DAC. He was demoted in 1886.

part political. In 1885, the Territorial Legislative Assembly had replaced the board of regents, which had hired Lilley, with a five-member board of directors that was less favorably disposed to his continuing tenure as president.²⁵

When Aldrich and other members of the freshman class learned of Lilley's forced resignation, they confronted Benjamin R. Wagner, president of the new board. He explained that Lilley had "never claimed to be the proper leader for several hundred students, and as the school had grown altogether beyond his expectations he thought it best to resign." Wagner assured students that Lilley had not been "crowded out" and that the position would be filled by someone from outside the institution. "With this explanation we were pretty well satisfied," Aldrich concluded, "and there seemed to be nothing more to do, so we dispersed." Upon returning to college in the fall, Aldrich learned more from Kerr and James A. Lewis, a professor of history and Latin. "They say," the student confided to his journal, "that during the last week of last year the board called each instructor up before them and examined his or her qualifications and credentials. Mr. Lilley acknowledged, so a member of the board said, that he was not a graduate of any college, and therefore had no degree but honorary ones. . . . They made the case look bad against Mr. Lilley."²⁶ The discovery that "Dr." Lilley lacked a college degree provided additional grounds for his demotion. The ousted president remained at the college for several years, however, as professor of mathematics.²⁷

Much of the college course work in the early years at DAC could be characterized as high-school level. To qualify as a freshman, one had only to be fourteen years of age and pass an eighth-grade examination. Many students were older, however, and their zeal to learn may have raised the level of scholarship. It was "doubtless true," William H. Powers contended in his college history, "that the maturity of the students and their earnestness made at all times their accomplishments much beyond those of high school pupils."²⁸ Aldrich, who had attend-

25. Kerr, "Founding," pp. 8, 13.

26. Aldrich Diary, 23 June, 14 Sept. 1886.

27. Sewrey, *History of South Dakota State College, 1884-1959*, p. 16.

28. *History of South Dakota State College*, ed. Powers, pp. 26-27.

ed high school in Rochester, Minnesota, the previous year, easily met the entry requirements. Among his first-year classes were chemistry, physics, philosophy, geometry, German, drawing, bookkeeping, instrumental music, military tactics, botany, and rhetoric. The college's agricultural emphasis seems to have been lost on Aldrich. In November 1885, he recorded his intention to drop agriculture, writing, "I want my time for more important things."²⁹

Students typically supplemented their studies with various literary, religious, and leisure activities. Most also worked to support themselves. Social interaction between the sexes took up a great deal of time, as well. Despite a general prohibition against men visiting women in their rooms, the girls' dormitory held an allure for college males. Tireless and unfailingly inventive in their petitions, they generally managed to finagle exceptions to regulations from the dorm matron, Nancy Van Doren. Aldrich, whose sister Nellie was at DAC during his first year and part of his third year, was considered lucky. Visiting one's sister in her dorm room was allowed, and one never knew, as Aldrich slyly observed, who else might come into the room while one was visiting.³⁰

Literary societies provided another opportunity for social interaction. In 1885, Kerr chaired the inaugural meeting of the college's first society, at which members elected Aldrich secretary. When that organization split into separate societies for men and women, Aldrich served as first president of the all-male group, called the Lyceum. The next year, he switched his allegiance to the Athenian Society, serving in various capacities, including a term as president.³¹ He remained loyal to this society for the rest of his college career, although he visited the rival Miltonian Society on at least one occasion. He recounted the experience pithily: "The music was very good, the rest not very. Bentley came in late and got up and debated on the wrong side of the question."³²

29. Aldrich Diary, 12 Nov. 1885.

30. *Ibid.*, 8, 9 Dec. 1885.

31. *Ibid.*, 13 Nov. 1885, 8 Feb. 1886, 11 Feb. 1887.

32. Aldrich Diary, 7 July 1888.

COLLEGE INQUIRY
 (This Table is for the use of the Faculty, and is not to be
 taken from the College, or used for any other purpose.
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DAKOTA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS.
 W. B. Smith, President.
 J. B. Smith, Secretary.
 J. B. Smith, Treasurer.
 J. B. Smith, Member.
 J. B. Smith, Member.
 J. B. Smith, Member.

Brookings, Dakota, 1888

Applications for Rooms - In order of dates.

✓ L. Langum	July 10	Stitcher	Sept 12
✓ Oscar Peterson	July 10	✓ T. M. Wardall	Sept 13
✓ Noble Oros	July 16	✓ Holgunsmith	Sept 13
✓ A. D. McKenny	July 20	✓ W. C. Dillow	Sept 13
✓ Peter Storm	July 29	✓ B. S. Brownson	Sept 14
✓ W. H. McKenny	Aug 1	✓ L. A. Bullis	Sept 14
✓ J. M. Aldrich	Aug 11	✓ M. L. Bates	Sept 16
✓ J. M. Knight	Aug 22	✓ J. J. Amphlett	Sept 17
✓ Hyfton Oros	Aug. 28	✓ A. Lawrence	Sept 19
✓ L. H. Morrison	Sept. 1	✓ B. C. Tyler	Sept 19
✓ J. E. Lampson	Sept. 1	✓ A. Benson	Sept 20
✓ Roberts & Knaper	Sept. 1	✓ Langum	Sept 20
✓ E. H. Payne	Sept. 2	✓ Edward Rung	Sept 20
✓ J. H. Peterson	Sept. 3	✓ E. E. Austin	Sept 20
✓ S. A. Barnes	Sept. 5	✓ Edson	Sept
✓ Humphrey & Pelline	Sept. 6	✓ 38 Croes	Sept. 20
✓ J. H. Gratton	Sept. 10	✓ 39 Casey	Sept. 20
✓ Robinson Bros.	Sept 16	✓ Jacobs	Sept
✓ 40		✓ 41	
✓ 42		✓ 43	
✓ 44		✓ 45	
✓ 46		✓ 47	
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✓ 50		✓ 51	
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✓ 178		✓ 179	
✓ 180		✓ 181	
✓ 182		✓ 183	
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✓ 190		✓ 191	
✓ 19			

Aldrich's name appears near the top on this list of room applicants for the 1887 fall term. Despite restrictive visitation rules, the dormitory was a center of social life at the college.

Literary society meetings included oratory, musical entertainment, and debates on such issues as whether schools had done more to support civilization than had churches; whether United States citizens should “continue to celebrate the Fourth of July as at present”; or how Dakota Territory should be divided.³³ “In society tonight I led the negative in regard to opening the Sioux Reservation, and was beaten,” Aldrich commented on 20 April 1888. “It was a hopeless case from the first,—the hardest question I ever got hold of to argue on.” His musical contribution the previous month had met a similar fate. Singing a

33. Ibid., 28 May 1886, 22 Apr. 1887, 13 Jan. 1888.

solo of "Clementine" at the Athenian Society, Aldrich noted that he "went most to pieces on the first verse."³⁴

In May 1888, Aldrich and four fellow DAC students traveled to Sioux Falls for an oratorical association contest. Arriving on a cold, rainy day, Aldrich described the trek from the train depot to Sioux Falls University as a long drive "through mud six inches deep on all the principal streets. The college is situated pretty far out in the country, although lots sell high a mile and a half beyond it." The University of Dakota delegation greatly impressed the five Brookings representatives. One hundred and eighty strong, the students from Vermillion had hired their own train—three carriages, a baggage car, and an engine—adorning it with University of Dakota banners. Proceeding up the street to the college, "they gave their yell about twice a block, 'Dako-TAH, DakoTAH, Univee of DakoTAH.'" Aldrich inserted a parenthetical comment in his diary in 1932: "[This was] my first view of real college students, [for] the University was many years ahead of the agricultural college in college spirit." The oratorical association included Sioux Falls University, the University of Dakota, Yankton College, Dakota University at Mitchell, and DAC.³⁵

For many DAC students and faculty members, church was an integral part of college life. On Sunday, one could attend morning and evening services and Sunday School at one of several churches in downtown Brookings, as well as afternoon prayer meetings in the chapel at the college building. In addition, revivals and sermon series were often held during the week. Aldrich frequented the Baptist or Methodist church and occasionally visited the Presbyterian church. It was Universalism, however, with its belief in the salvation of all souls, to which he was drawn. He had become acquainted with the sect while attending high school in Rochester, Minnesota, during the winter of 1884-1885. Brookings, by contrast, had no Universalist church, and Aldrich later commented that he found the town "extremely orthodox." Undeterred, he enthusiastically engaged

34. *Ibid.*, 23 Mar., 20 Apr. 1888. The Great Sioux Reservation, established in 1868 by the Fort Laramie Treaty, included all of present-day South Dakota west of the Missouri River. It would be officially opened to white settlers in February 1890.

35. *Ibid.*, 2, 3 May 1888 (with 1932 insert).

in heated discussions about endless punishment versus universal salvation with fellow students, professors (including Kerr), and even the pastor of the Baptist church, Reverend George S. Clevenger. Aldrich described one 1887 session with Clevenger in which "we had quite an argument for an hour and a half, but neither would give in much. He lent me a book called 'The Hereafter of Sin.' It is a dismal one." In May 1888, Aldrich walked several miles to the nearby town of Aurora to hear a visiting Universalist preacher. He thought seriously of studying for the ministry but eventually gave up that dream because of his financial situation.³⁶

Professor Kerr was also a faithful churchgoer. A staunch Methodist, he attended services and taught Sunday School at First Methodist Episcopal Church in Brookings. In his memoirs, he recounted how, as a young schoolteacher, he had recognized his determinative influence on pupils. "The question came to me," he wrote, "'What of your character?' I could not answer it satisfactorily so I sought the help of the church and the Great Ideal of Christianity." At DAC, Kerr also supported churchgoing as a means of preserving dormitory decorum. A diary entry for a Sunday in May 1886 noted that two students had been "playing ball in hall. Many are not attending church and S.S. Hence most about the building." By March of the next year, he observed an improvement in student discipline, due, he believed, to "firmness" and "the influence of church work and attendance." Through such activities, he concluded, "Their consciences are quickened."³⁷ Indeed, some students did think seriously about how to occupy themselves on Sundays. The following proposal appeared in the December 1885 issue of the school newspaper, the *Dakota Collegian*: "As Sunday is apt to be a long day at the college, we venture to suggest that it would be a pleasant relief to the students if the professors would take it upon themselves to give us a lecture every alternate Sabbath, or provide some other speaker for the occasion."³⁸

36. Ibid., 20 Apr. 1886 (with 1930 insert), 8 Feb. 1887, 27 May, 3, 30 June 1888.

37. Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," p. 97; Kerr Diary, 16 May 1886, 3 Mar. 1887.

38. *Dakota Collegian*, Dec. 1885.



Aldrich struggled to pay for his education and related expenses by taking on various jobs, including field work on the college farm, depicted here in its early years.

Like Kerr before him and like most of the other students at DAC, Aldrich worked his way through college. Because tuition and room rent were free to residents of Dakota Territory, most of his money went for board, clothing, travel, and books. At the close of each school year, Aldrich recorded his annual outlay: \$168.31 from 1 July 1885 to 1 July 1886; \$161.82 from 1886 to 1887; and \$224.26 from 1887 to 1888. He graduated with a small debt. Aldrich worked numerous jobs, sawing wood for the dormitory, teaching preparatory classes, selling books, setting type at the two local newspaper offices, and working on the college farm. In order to afford the journey home at the end of the college term, Aldrich sometimes labored at the farm for ten to twelve hours on Saturdays and rose as early as 3:30 A.M. on weekdays to put in a few hours of hoeing before breakfast. The pay was twelve and a half cents per hour.³⁹

39. Aldrich Diary, 24 June 1886 (with 1930 insert), 11-18 June 1887, 21 June 1887 (with 1931 insert), 30 June 1887 (with 1931 insert), 8 Aug. 1888 (with 1932 insert).

The most significant job Aldrich would hold during his student days at DAC turned out to be tending the college's reading room. The establishment of a separate reading room on the second floor of the college building in the fall of 1885 marked the beginning of the library, and both Aldrich and Kerr would figure actively in its future course. In early 1886, Professor Kerr and President Lilley offered Aldrich ten to fifteen dollars a month "to take charge of the library."⁴⁰ The young man eagerly accepted, starting work on 11 January. The reading room was initially open about twenty-two hours a week, and in May, the hours were extended to 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. daily. Aldrich worked in the reading room for the next three terms under Professor James A. Lewis, whom the college board of directors placed in charge in March 1886. In 1890, Kerr became librarian, a position he held through 1892 and again from January 1899 until December 1904.⁴¹

Aldrich enthusiastically solicited books for the growing collection, especially those presenting "the Universalist ideas of religion." In April 1887, when he unpacked a shipment of books on Universalism sent from Rochester, Minnesota, he reported, "Prof. Kerr looked at my books and said resignedly, 'I am willing to let anything go into that library except Tom Paine.'"⁴² The reading room at first shared its space with the college museum, later moving to the room above. In September 1886, Aldrich mentioned that Isaac H. Orcutt, professor of natural sciences and medical doctor for the college, had placed a "nicely mounted eighteen-inch alligator," along with some other specimens, in the museum.⁴³ This contribution joined a "fine spotted weasel" and Kerr's "Japanese curiosities."⁴⁴

Getting paid for his reading-room responsibilities proved problematic for Aldrich. Because the board had failed to make

40. Ibid., 9 Jan. 1886.

41. Philip Brown, *South Dakota State University's Library: A History*, Hilton M. Briggs Library Occasional Paper no. 1 (Brookings, 1987), p. 2.

42. Aldrich Diary, 20 Apr. 1886, 21 Apr. 1887. Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was an English-American political philosopher whose *Common Sense* (1776) helped spark the American Revolution. His *Age of Reason* (1794-1795), however, earned him a reputation as an atheist and enemy of the establishment.

43. Aldrich Diary, 22 Sept. 1886.

44. *Dakota Collegian*, Dec. 1885, Feb. 1886.

any financial arrangements, "there is no fund out of which I can properly be paid as librarian," Aldrich grumbled in his diary on 16 February 1886. When Aldrich appealed to Kerr, the professor suggested that he teach a class so he could get paid for both jobs out of the teaching fund. Accordingly, Aldrich taught the preparatory arithmetic class until Professor Lewis arrived and then taught the geography class for the rest of the term. In the fall of 1886, the job of selling textbooks was added to his reading-room duties. Needless to say, Lewis's suggestion in November that Aldrich "ought to take care of the reading-room [*sic*] for the privilege" did not go over well.⁴⁵ When the professor failed to pay him at the end of the 1886-1887 school year, Aldrich wrote to Kerr, to whom he owed money for board, explaining the situation and calling Lewis's action "little less than an outrage" and "contemptible meanness."⁴⁶ Aldrich's anger was tempered, however, when he learned that Lewis had not been rehired. A few months later, he reported in his diary that he had received a brusque note from Lewis along with a money order for \$13.50, "which you claim is due you."⁴⁷

The dismissal of Lewis and of English literature professor Carrie W. Daniels resulted in part from discord among the faculty. In writing about the college's early years, William Powers observed, "Small as the faculty was and agreeable as the members may have been individually, it was not harmonious and probably never could be made so."⁴⁸ In August 1886, the college board of directors selected Lewis McLouth of Michigan Agricultural College as the second president of DAC, and he assumed his duties in April 1887. In the meantime, Stephen K. Updyke of Watertown served as vice-president and acting president. Kerr alludes to the tensions among faculty and the "embroglios" that ensued during this period. In the fall of 1886, for example, "everything ran along smoothly until about Oct 7th," when "friction between the acting Pres. [Updyke] and ex-Pres. [Lilley]" erupted. "There were misunderstandings nearly all the rest of

45. Aldrich Diary, 16 Feb., 16 Nov. 1886.

46. Aldrich to Kerr, 22 June 1887, Kerr Papers, SDSU.

47. Aldrich Diary, 1 Sept. 1887.

48. Powers, "South Dakota Agricultural College under President Lewis McLouth, 1887-1896," [1916], p. 4, William H. Powers Papers, Archives/Special Collections, Hilton M. Briggs Library, SDSU.

the year," Kerr recorded. "Class work was a success but there was not much harmony between some of the teachers."⁴⁹

Weekly faculty meetings generated numerous entries in Kerr's 1887 diary: "Many diverse interests and all ambitious to succeed" (25 January). "There seems to be something to disturb or something to combat all the time" (3 February). "Faculties are composed of curious materials. There seems to be always some treading on of toes" (24 March). The unsettled state of affairs and changing alliances continued through the spring, leading Kerr to comment later that when President McLouth first came Professor Updyke was his chief adviser, but in a short time Updyke leagued with the outgoing president Lilley, and the new president "had a hard time of it. The term brought forth several

49. Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," p. 154.

In his 1887 journal, Kerr resolved to record "the many little incidents" of the college's turbulent first year, well aware that they "may become a portion of its history."

The image shows a handwritten diary page from 1887, featuring a calendar grid for January. The grid is divided into columns for the days of the week and rows for the months. The entries are written in cursive script. The page is titled "JANUARY, 1887" and includes a small illustration of a person's head in a circle. The handwriting is in dark ink on aged paper.

JANUARY, 1887

I have purchased another diary, not that I expect keep a daily record of the little events which occur in my little world, but that I may have space in which to jot down occasionally notes on passing events, later and have more practice in writing than I have had during the past year. Many little incidents connected with my work here may become a portion of its history.

SATURDAY, 1887

Found me in bookkeeping, trying to enjoy a vacation. At 10:00, by the Prof. Dept. of D. H. C. I had had a hard term's work of it and a few days' rest was quite a relief. I remained at the college until nearly noon when I had dinner at the hotel. After dinner Prof. Lewis and I made a few calls only finding Prof. Updyke's call. Rev. Walter at home. Met Rev. Conway at the hotel and Sen. Cook, ex-Senator. The latter related some of his experiences with Power, May 14.

jealousies and enmities and by Commencement there was considerable anxiety about our positions." At this time, Lewis and Daniels were dismissed, and four new faculty members were hired. Kerr noted, "I was not disturbed but came very near losing my position."⁵⁰ One year later, more than fifty students, Aldrich among them, signed a petition to have Updyke fired. The former acting president had been named Professor of English and history (the positions Daniels and Lewis had held), and the students evidently blamed him for engineering the dismissals. Updyke remained at the college, however, until 1890.⁵¹

The students engaged in politics among themselves as well, most notably in the literary and oratorical society elections. By 1887, two factions had emerged. "The group opposed to us were mainly those whose expenses were paid by their parents," noted Aldrich. "We were the ones who had to scrape up our own money as best we could." The rival faction included Charles and Wylie Mellette, sons of Arthur C. Mellette, soon to be elected the last governor of Dakota Territory and first governor of South Dakota. Describing the oratorical association elections in the spring of 1888, Aldrich wrote, "Political caldron [*sic*] bubbled all day pretty lively." The literary society elections could be just as incendiary. In October 1887, after much campaigning and plotting and after two ballots (the first having resulted in a total exceeding the members present), the outcome was "victory for our side," Aldrich recorded in his diary. "The opposing party began to kick after the result was announced, but we immediately adjourned. . . . This was the hottest election old Athenian ever had. The defeated are scheming for another ballot." The rift between the two factions was bridgeable, however, and civil relations prevailed, at least most of the time. Charley Mellette and Aldrich laid their rivalry aside in June 1887 when Mellette invited Aldrich to break his trip home to Grant County with an overnight stay at the stately Mellette home in Watertown.⁵²

In a less contentious election, Aldrich was chosen editor-in-chief of the monthly college newspaper, the *Dakota Collegian*,

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-58.

51. Aldrich Diary, 20 June 1888; Powers, "South Dakota Agricultural College under McLouth," pp. 5-6.

52. Aldrich Diary, 22 June, 28 Oct. 1887 (with 1932 insert), 6 Apr. 1888.

*President Lewis McLouth
served from 1887 to 1896.
His tenure was filled with
controversy and dissent among
teachers and students alike.*



for the 1886-1887 school year. Although he had dismissed the previous year's newspaper as not amounting to much, he began to look at things differently when the paper came under his management. The new editor took pride in getting the *Collegian* out on time, "considering the one-horse office in which it was printed" and strove to uphold the freedom of the press. He bristled when the newly arrived President McLouth suggested that he submit his editorials to the faculty for review, telling him, "I took some pride in running the *Collegian* myself and didn't know as I would like that." Writing editorials and locals and correcting proof was time-consuming, and as the monthly deadline approached, Aldrich invariably had to provide last-minute fillers. "I wrote 168 lines of local besides the editorial dept.," he reported in October, a scenario that was often repeated in the succeeding months.⁵³

53. Ibid., 2 Dec. 1885, 22 Oct. 1886, 28 Apr., 21 May 1887 (with 1931 insert).

Despite crowded conditions, friction and controversy, and the need to work long hours at studies and jobs, students still found time for light-hearted fun. The institution's small size and close quarters made social interaction between students and faculty unavoidable, and the latter sometimes found themselves involved in student pranks. During supper on 19 January 1886, for example, Aldrich and three friends made a bet with Nancy Van Doren, English teacher and matron of the girls' dormitory, "whether it would be possible to eat anything 'even as good as this apple pie' for a period of 30 days. Several of us boys assured her we could do it, with the result that she arranged to have an apple pie made for us daily." Aldrich and his friends would attempt to eat a quarter of an apple pie apiece each day for a month. If they succeeded, Van Doren would pay for the pie; if they failed, they would pay. But there was never a doubt in their minds as to the outcome. Their commitment and hardy digestive systems ultimately led to victory. All four young men not only ate their daily portion, but also successfully argued that the pie was "an added item" and that they were entitled to regular dessert, as well. On 17 February, the "last pie day," Aldrich boasted, "[I] have not had the slightest difficulty or got tired of apple pie at all. In fact I like apple pie better than when we began." The following day, the young men concluded with a flourish: "We each had a whole big uncut apple pie brought in. And each ate his without any *apparent* difficulty; it was however about all the pie I wanted just then."⁵⁴

References to antics and practical jokes are scattered throughout Aldrich's diary. In the fall of 1886, he recounted that college pranksters had persuaded a gullible student to have his hair dyed (with shoeblacking and ink) and then fooled him into believing that no one recognized him. The compliant victim allowed himself to be introduced to his classmates as "Mr. Delphin of Hand County." The next day, Aldrich reported, "they put a fresh coat on him and took him to table 5. The girls had been previously instructed, and talked as if they had never seen him before." Eventually clued in on the joke, the student good-naturedly "treated about twenty of the boys" to grapes at

54. Ibid., 19, 25 Jan., 17, 18 Feb. 1886.

lunch that day. In April 1887, Aldrich described another trick amiably played on a fellow student: "A. G. Cross writes college items for the Sentinel [one of two Brookings County newspapers]. In the ones he sent down today he had the following conundrum: 'Who is the crossest fellow in the college? Why, A.G., of course.' Gene Parker was setting it up, and he read it 'the corset fellow.' I said I would give him ten cents to print it that way, and they agreed to let it go in so and call it a mistake when Cross came in to kick about it. Cross is very fond of that conundrum, but I guess this will break him of it."⁵⁵

Among the other student escapades Aldrich recorded in his diary were the freshmen planting the seniors' tree upside down on Arbor Day and the students burning an old outhouse behind college hall. Hearing the commotion, Professor Kerr unwittingly added to the merriment by throwing snow on the roof. He enlisted a few young men to help, but "the boys were pretty careful to throw the snow where there was no fire," Aldrich wrote. "Part of the boys were bringing oil in fruit cans; they would get on the opposite side from Prof. and throw it on, and Prof. would shout, 'There, it's broken out in a new place.' They got the fire pretty nearly out once, and somebody ran off with Prof's shovel. They got to carrying oil a little harder, and Prof. finally caught on, and gave up the effort."⁵⁶

Aside from the vivid picture of college life they present, Aldrich's diary entries provide valuable information about daily life in the 1880s. Hairstyles, for example, merit several mentions. In March 1886, he reported, "Tonight some of the girls came to supper without bangs or frizzes. . . . The boys cheered them, and after supper got up quite a demonstration in front of the dormitory." The next day, "We boys most all wore bangs this morning. More of the girls than before appeared without them." Later in the year, Aldrich described his own attempt to appear fashionable. "Got my hair cut pompadour," he confided. "It wasn't a brilliant success. The barber, after he had it all cut, said there was no use trying to make it pomp, and parted it, but I am not discouraged yet." Two months later, Aldrich referred to his "burnsides," which he had decided to shave off.

55. *Ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1886, 27 Apr. 1887.

56. *Ibid.*, 27 Mar., 26 Apr. 1888.

"I had been letting them grow since just before Christmas," he wrote. "They were about half an inch long and quite luxuriant, but rather light in color."⁵⁷

The diaries also allow readers to glimpse the changing technology of the period. Aldrich often helped at the *Brookings County Sentinel* and occasionally at the *Brookings County Press*. In May 1887, he found newspaperman D. W. Kutchin "grinding out the Sentinel by hand, as the wind blew too hard to run his engine. I turned the press a while, then set up about half a column of type." In September, the diarist helped feed the newsprint, which "made me perspire at every pore. The whole 800 were printed in 80 minutes." Earlier in the year, Aldrich had also "set two sticks of type at the Sentinel office. Tried to empty a stick. Kutchin helped a little. Only spilled one letter, three m-quads, and a few spaces. Came pretty near pieing the whole though."⁵⁸ In December 1887, Aldrich reported that "the chapel and library were lit with gas for the first time tonight." Then, in March 1888, a new electric light powered by a "dynamo in the basement" illuminated the hall for the first time. In their rooms, however, students still used kerosene lamps, which they filled from barrels kept in the "lamp room" in the basement of the college hall.⁵⁹

Surviving winter at the college could be a formidable task. Steam heated the rooms, but the heating system was not always reliable and Aldrich reported having to stir up the fire in order to generate some steam. The winter of 1887-1888 was particularly hard. On 5 December, the students awoke to no heat at all. Aldrich reported the temperature in his room at thirty-four degrees, with everything "frozen up." On 12 January 1888, the "great blizzard" struck in the afternoon following a deceptively warm morning. "Just after dinner the wind shifted and we soon had a big blizzard on from N.W.," Aldrich recounted in his diary. "At dark it was very bad. . . . At ten o'clock the

57. Ibid., 4, 5 Mar., 3 Nov. 1886, 19 Jan. 1887.

58. Ibid., 29 Apr., 19 May, 20 Sept. 1887. The composing stick was a device in which lines of type were set before being emptied onto a galley, or long tray. A "quad," or quadrat, was a piece of type metal used for filling spaces and blank lines. An "m" (em) was the width of a square, or nearly square, piece of type, and to "pie" meant to jumble or mix up type.

59. Ibid., 17 Dec. 1887, 26, 27 Mar. 1888 (with 1932 insert). The dynamo, short for dynamo-electric machine, was a generator that converted mechanical energy into electricity.

storm was about the worst I ever saw.”⁶⁰ In his memoirs, Kerr noted that an estimated 135 persons lost their lives in the Dakotas alone. Aldrich’s brother Irwin, like many teachers in the region, spent the night at his schoolhouse with a student. Impassable railways halted trains and hence the delivery of food, fuel, and mail at various times from January through March 1888.⁶¹ “There is no wood in town and only a little coal,” Aldrich reported on 25 January. “The college has hardly enough to last a week.” Two days later, he hailed the arrival of “‘Storm King No. 2,’ with three engines, [which] plowed up from the east today and opened the railroad.”⁶²

Despite the intermittent blockades and the continuing cold and storms of 1888 (the season’s last snowfall came on 29 April), college activities went on. Students used George Washington’s birthday, a holiday, as an occasion to celebrate with a costume

60. Ibid., 2 Apr., 5 Dec. 1887, 12 Jan. 1888.

61. Kerr, “Autobiographical Jottings,” p. 160. For more on the great blizzard, see *Brookings County Press*, 19 Jan. 1888, and W. H. O’Gara, comp., *In All Its Fury: A History of the Blizzard of January 12, 1888*, ed. Ora A. Clement (Lincoln, Nebr.: January 12, 1888, Blizzard Club, 1947).

62. Aldrich Diary, 25, 27 Jan. 1888.



Nellie Roe, one of the first women graduates of DAC, was Aldrich's date for the costume party commemorating George Washington's birthday. Aldrich would marry her just short of five years later.

party. Aldrich "went over to the shops and made some knee-buckles out of a fruit can. Amalgamated them with mercury from my hydrometer, which I sacrificed for the purpose." Decked out in "kneebreeches . . . with knee-buckles and slippers, and a frilled shirt-front," he joined fifty or sixty other young men dressed in "whatever other revolutionary apparel they could hunt up." Not to be outdone, the women "all had their hair powdered, and wore lownecked—*tolerbul* low-necked-dresses, and kerchiefs. I went with Nellie Roe. She was beautiful in her Martha Washington costume."⁶³ Roe, who would graduate from DAC in 1889, was the woman to whom Aldrich would propose on the eve of his graduation.

In the spring of 1888, Aldrich enrolled in Professor Orcutt's entomology class, kindling a lifelong interest in insects. Equipped with a pint fruit jar and a butterfly net, the student enthusiastically tracked down water bugs, slugs, beetles, butterflies, and dragonfly larvae. The newly installed electric light in downtown Brookings was a prime spot to catch bugs after dark. Aldrich and his friend DeWitt ("Jake") Jacobs also set up a large lamp on the college building steps, and "before long the bugs and things began to arrive." In the annotations made to his diary in 1932, Aldrich acknowledged the debt he owed Orcutt for his introduction "to this fascinating field." Noting the college's lack of an insect collection or library and Orcutt's modest knowledge of entomology, Aldrich commended his professor for "wisely turn[ing] us loose to get acquainted with the insects."⁶⁴

Aldrich graduated from DAC in only three years, taking a heavy course load in 1888 and continuing through the summer term. In addition, according to Aldrich, President McLouth lowered the level of the course work, thinking it "too stiff for the pioneer conditions in the state. . . . He urged a few of us to take a little extra work and meet the reduced requirements in two years. I did not want to, but finally yielded to his superior wisdom."⁶⁵ Each of the three 1888 graduates (Aldrich, Aubrey

63. *Ibid.*, 22 Feb. 1888.

64. *Ibid.*, 18, 19 June (with 1932 insert), 5 July 1888.

65. Aldrich to William H. Powers, 28 Nov. 1930, Archives/Special Collections, Hilton M. Briggs Library, SDSU.

Lawrence, and Lulah Wellman) delivered a commencement oration. Aldrich selected "Problems of the Ballot" as his subject. As with all his orations, he recorded the total word count; this one contained 1,934 words. President McLouth preached the baccalaureate sermon, the text taken from Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter." Aldrich characterized it as "rather heavy." The ceremonies were held in the college's new chapel, located in the recently completed North Building, which now served primarily as the women's dormitory. The stage had been "finely ornamented with large houseplants, wreaths of barley, and strings of arbor vitae," noted Aldrich. "At the back our motto, 'Mens agitat Molem,' was placed in an arch. In front of the stage was a red, white and blue drapery. In the center this was looped up, and a shield with '88' was placed under it."⁶⁶

Leaving Brookings, Aldrich "plunged with much enthusiasm into the vocation of the book agent. Two days later, with less enthusiasm but more experience, I plunged out again."⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, he approached Dr. Orcutt, who had been appointed entomologist of the recently established Agricultural Experiment Station, about working as his assistant. Aldrich landed the job and, for the next few years, spent spring, summer, and autumn as a DAC instructor and devoted the winter months to studying entomology. Beginning in the spring of 1888, President McLouth had instituted a new calendar that gave students their long vacation in winter. Under such an arrangement, the reasoning went, the college would save on heating bills while giving students the opportunity to teach a term in rural schools. By attending DAC in the summer, they would gain practical agricultural experience. The plan was never popular, however, and a traditional college calendar was reinstated after the McLouth administration ended in 1897. Aldrich followed the suggestion of Albert J. Cook, an entomology professor at Michigan Agricultural College, and spent his winters at various universities studying the order Diptera (two-winged

66. Aldrich Diary, 5 Aug. 1888. *Mens agitat molem* translates as "mind agitates the mass," or "thought gives motion to matter."

67. Quoted in *Dakota Collegian*, Nov. 1888.

insects), a subfield in which only two other United States scientists were working.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, Aldrich's teaching position at DAC, now called South Dakota Agricultural College (SDAC), proved short-lived. In November 1892, Orcutt and Aldrich both lost their jobs in what came to be known as the "great upheaval." Since 1890, the college had been governed by two boards: a governor-appointed, nine-member board of regents that controlled all state educational institutions and a five-member board of trustees charged with overseeing local administrative details. At odds from the start, both groups vied for control of the fifteen thousand dollars in federal funds apportioned to the college under the 1887 Hatch Act establishing the Agricultural Experiment Station. The dissension over finances, charges of favoritism in regental faculty appointments, and persistent conflict among faculty and administration culminated in 1892 and 1893 with mass board resignations, the dismissal of eight faculty members, and a revolt by a majority of the students.⁶⁹

Kerr, like Orcutt and Aldrich, lost his position in November 1892. An outspoken advocate of liberal arts education, Kerr clashed with President McLouth, a vigorous supporter of the college's agricultural and vocational mission. Officially, the administration let Kerr go because he taught German. The federal funds allotted the college, McLouth insisted, could "only be used to give instruction in agriculture and the mechanic arts, the English language and the various branches of mathematical, physical, natural and economic sciences with special reference to their applications in the industries of life."⁷⁰ In a 1950 article in the college newspaper, Albert S. Harding, a long-time professor of history and political science, called McLouth's reasoning "pretty lame . . . for [Kerr's] work was history and political economy. German was incidental."⁷¹ The June 1893 issue of

68. Aldrich, "Breaking into Dipterology Forty Years Ago," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 20 (4 Dec. 1930): 496-97; Sewrey, *History of South Dakota State College, 1884-1959*, p. 19; J. Howard Kramer, *South Dakota State University: A History, 1884-1975* (Brookings: South Dakota State University, 1975), p. 32; Kerr, "Founding," p. 16.

69. Powers, "South Dakota Agricultural College under McLouth"; *South Dakota Collegian*, 14 Dec. 1949, 11, 18 Jan. 1950; Sewrey, *History of South Dakota State College, 1884-1959*, pp. 20-26; Kerr, "Founding," pp. 20-22; and Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," pp. 184-90.

70. Quoted in *History of South Dakota State College*, ed. Powers, pp. 141-42.

71. *South Dakota Collegian*, 11 Jan. 1950.



Kerr stands third from the left at back in this 1892 photograph of the university faculty, taken shortly before the upheaval that cost him and several colleagues their jobs. Lewis McLouth is seated third from the left, holding his hat.

the *Collegian* had likewise sided with Kerr, asserting that his “advanced ideas of what an agricultural college ought to be made him unpopular with the present management, yet he was held in high esteem by the students and citizens.”⁷²

Kerr chronicled the power struggle at SDAC, which continued through April 1893, in his own memoirs. “With the opening of the fall [1892] term,” he wrote, “the breach began to widen. There were strained relations between the two factions in the faculty all term. By the close of the term it was evident that one side or the other would have to go. . . . I was uncertain about my tenure of office.” While studying at the University of Chicago for the winter term, Kerr heard a rumor that he had been dismissed. On 21 November, “a telegram confirmed the report and eight of us were laid on the shelf. I was not greatly surprised but there was a momentary disappointment.” Returning to Brookings in February, Kerr “bade farewell to [the] institution till it shall be in the hands of a worthier crowd.” Dis-

72. *Dakota Collegian*, June 1893.

content among the students came to a head on 10 April 1893, when "over a hundred bolted all classes." Governor Charles H. Sheldon paid a personal visit, but to no avail. "On Mon. the 17th the remainder of the 102 bolters went home," Kerr reported. "Blue day for the college."⁷³ Although enrollment quickly rebounded, it took longer to rebuild the college's damaged reputation, heal the wounds caused by the loss of beloved faculty members, and attract competent replacements. With the resignation of McLouth in 1896 and the replacement of the two-board system with a single board of regents in 1897, the situation stabilized somewhat.⁷⁴

Kerr made the best of his circumstances, and in 1894, Brookings County voters elected him superintendent of schools. He

73. Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," pp. 184-85, 188, 190.

74. Sewrey, *History of South Dakota State College, 1884-1959*, pp. 22, 26; George L. Brown, "Development: The Heston Administration, 1896-1903," in *History of South Dakota State College*, ed. Powers, p. 35.

Kerr remained in South Dakota for the rest of his life, serving the university, community, and state in various capacities. The Brookings Register for 17 June 1920 bailed him as "dearly beloved by every alumnus and former student."



returned to SDAC in the fall of 1898, serving again as principal of the preparatory department and librarian. In December 1904, he left SDAC for the last time to serve as private secretary to South Dakota governor Samuel H. Elrod, a long-time friend and fellow graduate of DePauw University. After Elrod lost his reelection bid to Coe I. Crawford, Kerr returned to Brookings, where he devoted much time to historical research and writing. Involved in the founding of the South Dakota State Historical Society in 1901, he served as its president from 1907 to 1909, when he became editor of the *Minnesota and Dakota Farmer*. Two years later, voters elected him to represent Brookings County in the state legislature.⁷⁵ Kerr died on 16 October 1921, and the *Brookings Register* called his funeral service "the largest and most impressive . . . ever held in Brookings."⁷⁶

Aldrich also went on to a distinguished and varied career. Earning a master's degree from the University of Kansas and a Ph.D. from Stanford University, he worked as professor of biology at the University of Idaho from 1893 to 1913. He was then appointed assistant at the Bureau of Entomology, United States Department of Agriculture, and ultimately assistant curator and the custodian of Diptera at the United States National Museum (Smithsonian Institution). Aldrich also served as secretary and president of the Entomological Society of America, and he authored several books on insects. His collecting expeditions took him to the Black Hills, Alaska, Guatemala, and northern Europe. Aldrich married Nellie Roe in 1893. She died four years later, and their one child died in infancy. In 1905, he married Della Smith of Moscow, Idaho. By the time of his own death, on 27 May 1934, Aldrich had made a distinguished name for himself and was an esteemed alumnus of South Dakota State University.⁷⁷

Through their writings, Aldrich and Kerr recorded a vital portion of the college's earliest history, leaving a valuable legacy. Aldrich's resolve "to record the events of every day that passes" and Kerr's determination to keep the "many little inci-

75. Kerr, Life Diary; Kathryn Otto, "Dakota Resources: The Robert F. Kerr Papers at the South Dakota Historical Resource Center," *South Dakota History* 9 (1979): 249-51.

76. *Brookings Register*, 20 Oct. 1921.

77. Aldrich, "Breaking into Dipterology," p. 498; *Brookings Register*, 5 June 1934.



Pioneers in the field of entomology, Aldrich (left) and Axel L. Melander inspect Diptera specimens in Melander's laboratory at the State College of Washington in 1912.

dents of my own life history from being entirely forgotten" produced two fascinating chronicles of the personalities and forces that launched Dakota's agricultural college and fueled its development in the next century.⁷⁸ That Kerr cared deeply about the college and its students is evident throughout his writings. "Already many of the students have caught the college idea and are working nobly," he wrote in an essay for the *Dakota Collegian*, "but many others have notions tinged with the erroneous methods of some of the common schools. The sooner such ideas are abandoned the sooner shall we arrive at the successful idea. . . . Let shirking members come up with their parts nobly, become students in deed, and fall in with the idea that this is a college and not a school."⁷⁹

78. Aldrich, quoted in *Dakota Collegian*, Dec. 1886; Kerr, "Autobiographical Jottings," p. 1.

79. *Dakota Collegian*, Nov. 1885.

Several decades after his own college graduation, Aldrich reflected on his educational experience at DAC. "Judged by most standards," he wrote, "it would have been almost impossible for the students of the Dakota Agricultural College in 1885-86 to get any education to speak of. . . . There was no library; there were no laboratories; no traditions; no suitable place for students to live. The small faculty contained not a single specialist in anything except music; some of the professors had never completed a college course, and not one had pursued graduate work in residence in a university. The students were unprepared for college work; none of them I believe had graduated from a high school. . . . The regents had little conception of what the school ought to be doing." In spite of all that Aldrich concluded, "the small student body did obtain, in my opinion, something that students of the great universities of the present seldom attain,—a definite and lasting intellectual stimulus. A very fair proportion of them achieved real education in the course of time, as a result of this." Aldrich attributed this thirst for knowledge to the students' own earnestness, the college's pioneering atmosphere, and the practicality and helpfulness of the teachers.⁸⁰ Professor Kerr would have been pleased.

80. Aldrich to William Powers, 8 Dec. 1930, Powers Papers, SDSU.